

# tong tana

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## «I would like to have a school for our village».

*Penan children in Long Ajeng want to learn to read and write*

«I would like to have a school for our village. Then I can also learn to read and write and do arithmetic», says eight-year old Ana from Long Ajeng on the upper reaches of the Baram River. These bright Penan girls living in the rainforest village can already skillfully weave bracelets and mats out of rattan fibres from the forest. But they are also interested in the exciting world of letters and numbers.

Because the road to the school in Long Lamai, at a distance of almost 30 kilometres, is too long and too expensive, Ana cannot go to school. Her village is too remote to be integrated into Sarawak's public school system. Samling, the logging conglomerate that is active closeby, has offered to organised a school bus but the villagers decline to sign any agreement with the logging company. Only two of 16 Penan villages in the upper Baram region have their own schools, and the government does nothing to help the community of Long Ajeng.

**Because their village is so remote, Ana (photo) cannot go to school. Now the Penan want to build their own primary school in Long Ajeng.**





**They all want to go to school: The Penan children from Long Ajeng.**

### **Government punishes logging opponents**

«Our problem is that we reject the logging of the rainforest that the government has advocated. We are therefore punished», according to Yasaia Arah, deputy headman of Long Ajeng, «and we do not receive development projects». The athletic 50 year old man and his family welcomed us in a wooden house, just a few meters from the water's edge, that has a kitchen with an open fire place for cooking.

Yasaia knows what he is talking about. He was at the forefront in 1992 when his village put up a blockade to try to stop the construction of a logging road by the Samling company. The blockade was successful for nine months until a large contingent of police broke it up with clubs and tear gas. As a punishment, the government even today is still refusing to issue an identity card to Yasaia (see next page).

### **Community takes the initiative for the construction of a preschool**

«We Penan are used to taking care of ourselves», Yasaia says. «Therefore we have assumed the initiative for the construction of a preschool. Because we are aware that our children, without schooling, will not be able to keep up with developments in the future.» Then Yasaia takes out a list from a large folder. It contains

the clearly written names of all 94 children from Long Ajeng – 48 girls and 46 boys between two and 13 years in age – Ranti, Yeremia, Yosia, Menti, Helen, Urime, Rosita and many others.

The community has already selected a place for building the school at the edge of the village. And based on the experience in other villages downstream, the Penan already have a clear idea of how they want to realise a school facility with the building of a simple wooden construction. Two young women will complete a training programme for teaching in Penan and Malay. It is being offered in the neighbouring state of Sabah by PACOS, the indigenous organisation specialised in school projects for local communities.

It is clear that the Penan are dependent on outside sources for the financing of the preschool building and the teachers' training. The Bruno Manser Fonds has studied the project and said that it would be willing to support the community in the realisation of its preschool – so that Ana's wish can be fulfilled.

Lukas Straumann



# He has been waiting for an identity card for 20 years: the incredible story of Yasaia Arah

«My name is Yasaia Arah. I have been living in the Penan village of Long Ajeng since I was a small boy. I was born at the end of the 1950s in the forest where my family was leading a nomadic life. Around 1960, encouraged by the then British colonial government, we settled here.



On 17 October 1986, I heard that a government official was somewhere in the vicinity and I went to him to ask for an identity card. Two years later I received a birth certificate. Although I have

been at the offices of those responsible an innumerable number of times since then, until today I still don't have an identity card. The reason is that I have resisted the destruction of the rainforest by the Samling group.

In 1989 I was arrested because I took part in the blockade of Long Belingan and spent two months in prison. In 1993, when we organised the major blockade of Long Sebatu, I was again imprisoned for two weeks. Other than this, I have never done anything against the law, and my election as deputy headman shows that my village has trust in me.

The registration officials in Marudi said to me: «If you sign a declaration stating that you will no longer resist the logging, we will issue you an identity card within three days.» I answered: «I will not support the loggers. It is up to you to decide if you want to accept my request. But I will not sign a declaration.»

I believe that the behaviour of the officials is not just. Many of the people in the village have the same problem. Not even our headman Jawa Nyipa has an identity card. The government punishes us because we want to preserve the rain forest as a basis of our livelihood»

## Long Kerong headman disappears without leaving a trace

The shocking news reached us from Long Kerong, the Penan village in the Baram area where the Bruno Manser Fonds has established a health care centre. Headman **Kelesau Naan** has disappeared without leaving a trace. The headman was last seen on 23 October in the vicinity of his paddy fields close to Long Kerong. In spite of a major search effort, the Penan have no knowledge of his whereabouts. Kelesau Naan is one of four main plaintiffs and a key witness in the Penan land rights claim that has been pending since 1998.

The use of violence cannot be excluded in the disappearance of Kelesau Naan. Tensions between loggers and the Penan in the Long Kerong area have intensified in recent months, and the Sarawak government and the lumber companies have increased their pressure on the Penan. In the 1990s, there were already two cases of Penan who were involved in disputes with the timber companies and who disappeared. And the disappearance of Bruno Manser in May of 2000 still has not been clarified.



## News in brief

### Good news for Guyana's primeval forest: Samling fined for illegal logging

*Samling, the Malaysian timber company that is supported by international banks such as Credit Suisse and HSBC, was sentenced to a fine of US\$ 470,000 for illegal logging in South American Guyana. In addition, Samling must immediately withdraw from three illegally managed forest concessions with an area of 230,934 hectares (2,309 km<sup>2</sup>) – corresponding to an area of rainforest that is vaster than the combined cantons of Zurich, Basel Stadt and Basel Land.*

*The fine imposed by the government of Guyana is a direct result of the campaign against Samling's destruction of the rainforest that we have co-sponsored. Last May, at the invitation of the Bruno Manser Fonds, the Guyanan forestry expert Janette Bulkan revealed Samling's illegal activities in her home country. Shortly thereafter, the Malaysian loggers were forced to withdraw from the area of the indigenous village of Akawini where they had caused significant damage.*

*Credit Suisse was the global coordinator of Samling's initial public offering in Hong Kong in March 2007 and attested to a clean bill of health for the company – without justification as is now officially known.*



### United Nations General Assembly passes Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

*Historic day at the UN in New York: On 13 September 2007, the UN General Assembly by a vote of 143 to 4 (and 11 abstentions) voted to accept the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With this pioneering declaration, the community of states – including Switzerland and Malaysia – for the first time recognised the cultural and legal structures, traditions and diversity of indigenous peoples.*

*For further information: [www.bmf.ch/news](http://www.bmf.ch/news)*



### Swiss National Council favours obligatory wood declaration

*In its session this last fall, the Swiss National Council agreed to submit the motion of Remo Gysin (SP Basel Stadt) to the Federal Council. The motion, requesting an obligatory labelling of wood according to type and origin, was passed by a vote of 86 to 77. The Swiss government thus received a binding mandate to draw up the necessary legislation.*

*By submitting the motion, Parliament fulfilled a long-standing demand of environmental organisations. Bruno Manser had already called for an obligatory declaration for imported wood with a hunger strike in front of the parliament buildings in 1993. On 9 March 1994, he brought a petition for an obligatory declaration with 10,300 signatures to Parliament (photo). The Bruno Manser Fonds is pleased with this decision on the part of Parliament and is hoping that it will be quickly realised by the Federal Council.*



**With a longboat to physiotherapy: Andrea Huber and Markus Witzig from Zurich were in Sarawak for two months for the Bruno Manser Fonds where they provided physiotherapy to the Penan free of charge as part of the health care project. Many thanks to Andrea and Markus for your help and commitment.**

## Impressum

**Tong Tana means «in the forest» in the language of the indigenous Penan living in the rainforest of Sarawak (Malaysia)**

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